L: Hambourlin E-4,5 (1934) 1937 BV3 Haiti BV3
Mirebalais

tial structure with rounded arches in the Roman style, roofed over, like most other buildings, with galvanized iron. Other public buildings are the town hall — the Mairie — and the "Hall of Justice"; near by are the stone walls of a public building begun some years ago as a school, but destined apparently to house what is known as the "Bureau of Contributions," a euphemism for the tax-collector's quarters. Despite the fact that Mirebalais was one of the most difficult regions for the American occupation to subdue during the Caco uprising of 1918-20,[10] it was one of the first districts where the Gendarmerie d'Haïti was completely Haitianized, and from which all American Marine officers were withdrawn. Only a small detachment is stationed there at present. Its well-kept barracks are near the church, and the prisons form a part of the same compound, from whence issue daily the striped-suited prisoners, men and women, under guard or alone on parole, who do communal work in the town and the near-by countryside.

The town awakens at dawn to the chattering of domesticated guinea-fowl and the crowing of cocks. Occasionally a camion rumbles through the principal thoroughfare: more rarely an automobile dashes by in great clouds of dust on its way to Las Cahobas, or Hinche, or Santo Domingo City. If it is a market day, the streets are early filled with country folk on their way to dispose of their produce, and the clatter from the market place behind the church is heard everywhere until the heat of the day brings a lull to all commerce, and drowsiness once more settles over everything. By mid-afternoon during the planting season, drums can be heard over the countryside. The sounds are not those of the "throbbing" vodun drums — though they have more than once been mistaken for them by travelers — but they set the rhythm for the communal work of the *combites*, which perform cooperative agricultural labor. As the rapid dusk follows the disappearance of the sun behind the mountains, the voices of

[illegible] 1-4,5 (1834) 1907 SV3 Haiti SV3
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above, *A street.*
below, *The place and the church.*

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[facing P. 10]

Simple annual rites are held for the gods in January, each family giving small offerings in its house of worship to its own deities. These minor ceremonies are not to be confused with the extended rituals which a family may perform but once in a decade or a generation. Because of the excessive preparation and large outlay these entail, such rites are often postponed from year to year. According to some, this postponement is sought through an *action de grâce*, based on Church ritual, while others maintain that it is best necessary on his special day to appeal to the deity who is troubling the family, give a small offering — a *mangé sec* — and ask for the desired respite. This may be done several times, until crop failures, sudden deaths, and the loss of valuable property begin to afflict the family, whereupon the family head seeks out a *houngan*, who by divination determines the supernatural forces that are responsible for these misfortunes; and when his statement that the gods have reached the end of their patience is confirmed independently by several other priests who are consulted, active preparations for the major rite are finally set in motion.

Any such important ceremony must be held on the ancestral habitation, and centers in the *maison de servitude*, the family house of service for the gods. The house itself, to be differentiated from the *hounfort*, or "temple" of the *vodun* priest, may be elaborate or simple in accordance with the status of family members in the *vodun* cult.[9] At one end of the sacred house is a platform about two and one half feet high on which are placed calabash plates for the *loa*, six for the Créole deities, three for the Mystères Guinée, and a white plate with a "thunder stone," or Neolithic celt, and a necklace for Damballa. Not all *cailles mystères* are painted, but some, it is said, are green "for hope," and some red "for victory," while one was said to have designs of flowers and snakes painted on the wall above the platform.[9] These houses usually have two rectangular rooms, each with a separate entrance and each having its platform at the narrow end facing the doorway. One of

the rooms is consecrated to the *loa*, the other to the spirits of twins and the family dead. If the house is a large one with three rooms, the third will be for the Congo *loa*. It was also said that occasionally such places of worship reserve one room for the Rada deities, a second for the Pétro *loa*, and the third for the Congo gods, the dead and twins being worshipped elsewhere. For the Ibo gods, however, it is agreed in Mirebalais that there is never a separate room. But whether the gods are worshipped in a single-room thatched shelter or a more impressive "temple" with a metal roof, none of the major categories of supernatural powers are neglected.

In the main, large ceremonies are concerned with the task of restraining, or less often of pacifying, deities that have been molesting a family, and of making contact those who have been demonstrating their goodwill toward the group. Such rites must be sharply differentiated from the ordinary *vodun* dance which, coming after the family ritual, forms but a part of this complex, and serves to express joy at the danger averted and gratitude for the good that the friendly *loa* are to bring. At the ceremony drums may or may not be employed; at *vodun* dances they are indispensable. Possession is induced at the ceremony by the *houngan's* invocations; at the dance by the rhythm of the drums. The ceremony is attended only by members of the family and those who are specially invited; invitations to the *vodun* dance are broadcast over the countryside, and all take part in the social phases of the evening. For the ceremony, sacrifices not alone of cereals and drinks but also of the blood of animals are provided; at the *vodun* dance only minor offerings are given. And while both types of ritual are a part of a single functioning religious system, it is at the first where the most important end is achieved, that of obtaining protection from hostile gods and gaining the favor of those who are friendly.

The pattern of the ceremony — called a *service loa* — is sufficiently definite to allow a generalized version to be given.

preparing to seek shelter from the rain, new possessions continued, until, saying: "The *loa* are greater than I am," he went on with the ceremony, singing:

Ounsige Dumballa Wedo,	Ounsige Dumballa Wedo,
Laissé couté, Ounsige-o!	Permit coiling, Ounsige!
Ai-bobo!	*Ai-bobo!*
Main entré,	I enter,
M'ap salué loa.	I salute the *loa.*
Ogun, Ogun Achade,	Ogun, Ogun Achade,
O, Ogun Achade,	O, Ogun Achade,
Hier soir Ogun fai' yon rêve'-o	Last night Ogun dreamed a dream-o
Rêve' li tourné légidé.	Dreamed he turned a spy.

A woman became possessed by Dumballa, as did the young man who had "had" Gede the preceding night of the ceremony; the woman was in a gay mood, going about smiling and laughing, while the man threw himself in the water and rolled like a snake. And since the *loa* were coming so strongly, the *houngan* began the ceremony of washing and presenting the sacrificial animals, which this time included two white male goats, one very large and one smaller, a white sheep, and six or seven fowls of various colors. The presentation made, the entire group marched singing up the path to the house, the flag-bearers saluting with their banners the woman so happy in her possession.

As the procession came up the hill, it passed a newly built small house, intended to serve as the family place of worship for the *loa* now introduced into the habitation, and a framework of brush, or *tonnelle*, that had been erected as a shelter under which the postponed *vodun* dance was to have taken place. Without pausing, they proceeded slowly to the gate-

L: Hamburger E-4, 8 (1924) 1957 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mitchell

of the other. Arrived at the *tonnelle*, both were finally induced to come to their feet, to be immediately sent away and freshly dressed.

Inside the family shrine, on the ground at the right hand as one entered, were the articles of food and drink that usually constitute a "dry" offering, or *manger sec*—tafia, canava, cakes, grilled maize, coffee grounds, sirop, and bowls of cornmeal called *ayrassat*, with water. The *houngan* made more *service* just inside this door to honor the gods that were to be worshipped here, as the "ceremony of the sheep," a sacrifice for the Rada *loa* named St. John the Baptist, was begun. A table was placed under the *tonnelle*, and a container of water in which the animal was first washed. He was then made to stand on the table, where a fresh white table-cloth had been spread, while he was combed, powdered, and perfumed. A piece of white cotton cloth was tied about the horns of the animal, and a lighted white candle was held in place on the right horn or at times between the horns by an attendant. While a song honoring Damballa Wedo was sung, the *houngan* went into the small house to care for the two women, who were still in a state of possession. He set them dancing inside and after a few minutes they were led forth by "Legba," each to pour water and to light a candle before the sheep. The two goats were next washed and "dressed," white cloths and soft beeswax candles also being twisted about their horns. Other offerings under the *tonnelle* were a white pigeon for Damballa and a red cock for Ogun.

Each member of the family now took the fowl or animal that was his offering, as all were summoned inside the shrine, where final directions were given regarding the disposal of the sacrifices, and invocations were spoken to the gods. After this they came out, placing the animals before the men who were waiting to see to the killing, which was carried out in a manner even more matter-of-fact than on the first night of the ceremony. By this time it was about half past six o'clock, and

Saturday nights. This is not because of the especially sacred character of the day, but rather because the Haitian government, in order to assure a continuous working week, refuses permits for other days. The occasions for the dances are varied, as is evident from those given during the course of this fieldwork. One of these was that of a *hungan* as a compliment to visitors "who knew Dahomey" and was conducted as a serious rite in the worship of the *loa*. Two dances marked the end of *services* for family gods, and were variously interpreted as tributes to the family dead and the twins, who must not be neglected in any religious observance, and as celebrations offered in praise of the gods who were to protect the families, giving the dances, to mark the "restraining" of the evil spirits responsible for their troubles. Two other dances celebrated the "baptism" and initial use of new sets of drums. As has been pointed out, there are also non-religious occasions on which *vodun* dances are given. On days of secular celebrations, such as the anniversary of the declaration of Haitian independence, or the withdrawal of the Marines, the *vodun* dancing is purely social, though the ritual drums are used, the sacred songs are sung, and the steps of the dances are those seen at any Saturday-night gathering. Added to the fact that no possessions or other manifestations of serious worship of the *loa* occur, the "secular" *vodun* dances differ from the others in that they are held away from any family shrine, taking place within towns or cities, something never permitted in their non-social, religious counterparts.

The *vodun* dance — and in the remainder of this chapter only the dance which has significance in the worship of the *loa* will be considered — is patterned like all other ceremonies of the cult.[1] It is held at a family habitation, under an open brush shelter known as a *tonnelle*, constructed for the occasion next to the family *maison de servitude*. If the habitation at which the dance is given is not the one where this house of worship is found, the shelter is built near a hut so that those possessed will have a place to retire.

will have a place to retire. The *tonnelle*, which is merely a flat brush roof supported by a number of upright posts, must be built strongly enough to withstand the exertions of those possessed, who not only lean heavily on the supports, but sometimes climb through the brush roof to lie for a time on the cross-beams which form the base for this flimsy covering. Its ostensible aim is to protect the participants from what is known as the *serige*, or "snow," as the heavy dew is called, but, as might be expected, the structure has a ceremonial as well as a utilitarian purpose. Of particular importance is the central post, called the *poteau-cimetière*, or the *poteau mitan*, because the gods are believed to wait there until their drum rhythms sound, when they use this to descend into the *tonnelle*. The fire which burns during the whole period of the dance near the entrance to the habitation is also characteristic and indispensable. It is for Legba, who, as guardian of the entrance-way must first be worshipped, in order that he may permit the other deities to come.

The dances may begin shortly after sundown, but are not fully under way until two or three hours later, and last all night. In no case was a dance witnessed which began while there was daylight, though during the dry months, January and February, when there is no work to be done in the fields, dances open at a somewhat earlier hour. The rectangular dancing-space under the *tonnelle* is lined with spectators, who are seated on such chairs and benches as the family giving the dance can provide or such others as have been brought by their owners, though, in the main, people stand. The vigor of the dance varies as the night progresses. It is usually slow in starting, people drifting in later as they finish their evening meal, while the best drummers are rarely present at the outset. Unless the dance follows an earlier ceremony, such as the baptism of drums, or a *hounfort*, the *houngan* in charge also does not appear until a late hour and even when there has been an earlier rite, such a personage may well go to his home to rest before returning for the night's effort.

L. Herskovits S-4,6 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
interlibrary

The cult of the dead[1] is to be differentiated from the worship of the *loa* and from the twin cult in that its African form has been modified to a far greater extent than those others by the influence of the Catholic Church. Yet, though the modes in which respect is shown the dead are principally those of the Church, the attitudes and beliefs which underlie the cult —the meticulousness with which the tranquillity of the dead is insured, the fear in which they are held, and, above all, their close association with magic as an important sanction behind this force—all these take on a distinctly African stage. Perhaps the point of view taken toward the dead, and the manner in which the living cope with their power, can best be set forth at the outset by giving a sketch of the pattern of funerary and post-funeral rites, since these form the basis of the entire cult.

Wailing by all present begins with the approach of death. There are cries such as: "*Adieu, bon Dieu, Manman mo-o, wai, wai! Jodi-a toi-et-toi qui t'il mouri! Côté m'ap wé li encor?* —Good-by, O good God, O my mother, wai, wai! Today such-and-such a one has died! Where will I see him again?" The members of the family tie white or black kerchiefs about their wrists, while others present use kerchiefs of any color at hand. The doors of any *hounfort* or *maison de servitude* in the habitation are closed, and thorny acacia branches are placed in front of them, so that the dead, who are believed to go about everywhere, cannot "spoil" the sacred place by entering it.

The body is laid in a shallow trench dug in the floor of the room, and there washed and prepared for the funeral by a professional *baigneur des morts*—man or woman according to the sex of the dead—and his assistants. Some member of the family watches them to see that the "three drops" of moisture believed to be in every dead person's mouth are not caught on a cloth when the body is turned over, for they are held to have great potency for the working of black magic, and a sorcerer would give a great deal for them. Cold water,

all aspects of the natural and supernatural. But the reputable cult priest does not dabble in "black" magic—the kind that maims or destroys human beings. One who does so is said to "work with two hands": one for the loa and one for evil. (The expression *servi di mains*—"serving with two hands"—is also applied to a cult chief who deals with deities of more than one "nation.") Many a cult priest in making his ritual flour drawings on the earth holds his left hand behind his back and draws with his right, giving testimony that he "works with one hand" only.

Each cult priest maintains his own cult temple, or *hounfor*. There are no cult officials above him, as there is no formal religious organization beyond the *hounfor* itself. Within his own special community he is therefore the chief religious functionary, the apex of an intricate social organization. Under the cult priest, ordinarily, there are two grades of assistants, and below them two classes of servitors.

The cult priest is usually referred to as a *houngan*, a Fon (Dahomean) title signifying "spirit chief." Sometimes he is called *gangan* (a Bantu word meaning "conjurer" or "doctor")[2] or *caplo*. He also is known by the title *hard* or *hun'o*, which seems to be derived from *hunon*, the diviner or priest of the Dahomean Fa cult.[3] The houn'o is, in fact, sometimes referred to as a *diviner*, and he is regarded by some Haitians as a clairvoyant and a practitioner of magic. As in Dahomey, the houn'o in Haiti foretells fate through the throwing of shells or chips, much in the manner of the secular game *mayombe*. He also reads destiny with small sticks or zebra. In earlier days the cult priest was sometimes known by the Yoruba name *babalao*, a title which has been corrupted to *papalo*. A female cult leader is known as a *mamboo*. She is presumed to have, in a general way, the same powers as the houngan, though in some quarters her *connaissance*, or "understanding," is not regarded so highly, and her status is believed to be somewhat lower.

Directly under the houngan is his chief assistant, the *laplace*, and perhaps a little below him on the ladder, the *mamboo caille*. The laplace is regarded as the vice-houngan, and he assumes responsibility for running the *hounfor* in the absence of his chief. The mambo caille, a woman, runs the cult center in the absence of both the houngan and the laplace. One step further down the ladder is the *hounfenicon*, who acts as a sort of chief of the main body of devotees. These high-ranking assistants to the houngan are sometimes called *hadjicon*, or keepers of the altar.

The servitors of the cult are known as *hounsi*, or "spirit wives," a name that was given to certain categories of cult servants in Dahomey.[4] There are two main groups of hounsi: *kanzo* (those who have passed through a ritual fire test) and *bossale* (those whose loa are wild or untamed). The

[2] [Footnote appears on p. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]
[3] [Gorer, Africa Dances, p. 129; Herskovits, Dahomey, I, 208 ff. Cf. p. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]
[4] [Foot note appears on p. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]

2: Courlander B-5 (1907-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

approval of the candidate's elevation is needed. He is also regarded as being on more intimate terms with the family ancestors who, likewise, must be in accord with the proceedings. The candidate for the asson is confined within the hounfor for a number of days, during which he takes purification baths and participates in other rituals. The rites that take place during this period are prescribed by the elder priest who has assumed responsibility. When the purification is ended, the candidate emerges into the *peristyle* (roofed court) to participate in the general service, and to undergo further tests.

Present during the ceremonies are all the principal houngans of the region—men who will be friendly associates of the new priest or, possibly, unfriendly competitors. The candidate is tested on his knowledge of how to use the asson and the tiny hand bell, and in the course of the service he is mounted by the loa who is the chief protector of the cult temple. Animals are sacrificed, and all the loa sacred to the hounfor are invoked and asked for their approval and support. But it is not only the loa and the dead who must indicate their approval. The elder houngan polls the hounsi kanzo on whether they will accept their new cult chief and follow him. He also asks the chief drummer, who polls his assistant drummers. It is taken for granted that the decision is in the hands of the hounsi. The consensus is known before the actual service, but the formality of asking the question is observed. Should the hounsi refuse to accept the candidate for the asson, the elevation cannot take place.

The city and the countryside contain many self-styled houngans and bocors who are not recognized as bona fide by the community, regardless of the route by which they claim to have achieved their station. Sometimes they are regarded as *pas fort* (not strong); that is, they do not have profound knowledge and understanding. The Haitian is quick to detect the difference between a houngan who knows and one who does not know. Many are stated to be outright fakes. One man who attempted to hold a service in Port-au-Prince aroused such contempt and disgust that a number of persons who had been drawn by genuine interest walked out with remarks that the man should be punished. In fact, his failure to show any essential qualifications for the houngan's role was commented upon in a song of ridicule that made its appearance at a secular dance that same night. The song noted some of the humorous aspects of the service, such as when the "impostor" struck himself vigorously on the head with the flat of a machete to show his "strength" and virtually incapacitated himself for the rest of the evening.

It is easily observed that no two hounfors are exactly alike. They differ

2: Courlander 8-5 (1937-1965) 1960 8V3 Haiti 8V3

in many details. But, in general, the cult establishment consists of a central building of one or more rooms with an adjoining court, or peristyle, over which there is a covering—usually a straw roof. The covering, called the *tonnelle*, is supported by a number of poles, one of which is placed squarely in the center of the court. This center pole—the *po'teau mitan* or *po'teau planté*—is the focus of most of the ritual activities. The loa who descend upon the service enter by way of this pole. The ritual *vèvès*, or flour paintings, are made at its foot. Around it all the dancing takes place. On certain rare occasions when rituals are held in the open, a carefully selected tree becomes the center post—though it is by no means certain that the po'teau mitan is not, in fact, a symbolic tree.

The building adjoining the peristyle contains the inner sanctum. Here are deposited the paraphernalia of the cult, such as ritual bottles and jars, flags of the société, and the iron kettles used in various ceremonies. On the walls there may be primitive paintings of the special loa of the hounfor, or perhaps of his symbol. The loa of the sea, Agwé, may be represented by a ship. Damballa, the serpent-rainbow loa, may be represented by a snake or a rainbow. Usually there are colored lithographs of Catholic saints, who have both Catholic and African names. And there are hand-beaten iron crosses, dishes containing Indian celts in which loa are believed to reside, gourd bowls, and carved wooden double and triple bowls used for services to dead twins and triplets. Upon the altar place, called *badji*, there are the *crichet* or *govis*, earthen jars or bottles in which rest the loa removed from the heads of people who have died. Sometimes special niches are built on the hounfor grounds for the deities. Each cult priest designs his hounfor in his own way.

A hounfor belonging to a mambo near the town of Croix des Missions gave the appearance of having a large and prosperous société. Under the tonnelle eight beautifully carved Arada drums were suspended from a single peg. At a respectable distance hung a Martinique drum used only for dances on the occasion of a Nine Night. Inside the hounfor was an impressive display of sacred objects and decorations. One corner of the room was reserved for Symbi Yendéso, a patron loa of drinking water and rainfall. He was portrayed on the wall as a long, thin snake crawling in a maze of crosses. On the ground beneath the picture was a small concrete pool, in which two water snakes swam. Another corner was reserved for Agwé, and on his wall was a picture of a steamship. Along the back of the altar was an impressive array of govis, containing the spirits removed from the heads of deceased persons. There was a large plate of loa stones, and various protective charms stood near by. Flags and sabres

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1965) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

were stacked against the wall, and set about in various places were several assons, iron crosses, Catholic lithographs, chains and iron bars for the loa Ogoun, candles set in bottles, and an old forged double bell of African design.

Some of the hounfors found elsewhere are more elaborate and reflect the richer resources of the immediate community, or the creative impulses of the houngan and his helpers, or the pressure of competition. Some cult temples are prolific with painted designs and symbolic representations of the deities. Others are unpretentious, simple, and even Spartan.

In his book *En Haiti*, written approximately fifty years ago, Eugene Aubin describes a hounfor in the Cul-de-Sac Plain, a few miles from Port-au-Prince, as he saw it in 1906:

[The] *hounfor* is fronted by a *peristyle*, which is used for the Vodoun dancers and services; it is a large area, with a floor of beaten earth, covered with a straw roof. On three sides the walls rise to support the roof; on the fourth there is the inscription:

Société la Fleur de Guinée
Roi d'Engole
[Flower of Africa Society
King of Angola]

indicating the name of the patron of the society [the loa Roi Angole, or Wangol], over which the *houngan* presides. The *hounfor* is an ordinary house, a little larger than average. The sanctuary contains a principal *pé* [altar], running the whole length of the room on one side, and another altar, a little smaller, in one of the corners. These *pés* are altars largely made of brick, in which the under part is decorated with hearts and stars in relief; above, draperies hang from the ceiling. The lateral *pé* is divided into three compartments. There are, therefore, four sections in all, consecrated to each of the *loa* served in the *hounfor:* Aguay Aoyo [Agwé Woyo], Damballa, Ogoun Badagry, and Loco [Loko], Nago King. Maître Aguay is represented by the customary little boat; a medallion is consecrated to Monsieur Damballa, shown holding two snakes in his hand; a figure on horseback represents Ogoun Badagry, with a woman at one side holding a flag; Papa Loco is pictured in full uniform, smoking a pipe and fanning himself. The walls are covered with religious paintings [Catholic lithographs]. The back of the altar is occupied by numerous carafes in baked clay, called *canaris*, which contain the . . . *mystères* [spirits taken from the heads of the dead] gathered in the *hounfor;* in front are bottles of wine, liqueurs and vermouth presented to them in homage; then the plates, the cups for the *mangers-marassas* [feasts for the twin spirit], crucifixes, hand bells, *assons* for directing the dance or calling the *loa;* plates filled with polished stones [celts] inherited from the Indians—"thunder stones," symbols of Damballa, which Saugo [Sobo] the god of lightning hurls from the sky into the enclosure of his favorite *papaloi* [*houngan*]. Beside these miraculous stones are many coins of copper or silver [property of the *loa*]. The *loa* . . . possess coins of Joseph Bonaparte, King of Spain, minted in 1811; of Frederick VII of Denmark, 1859; of Charles IV of Spain, 1783, and of President Boyer, dated year 27 and year 30 of Haitian Independence. On the ground there is placed a coconut-oil lamp; in the corner, the flags of the *hounfor* and the saber of [the] *hapleur*, the man who acts as master of ceremonies in the services.

2: Courlander B-5 (1837-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

in the services. In the court, the bases of four sacred trees . . . are surrounded by circles of masonry [low brick walls]. These *reposoirs* are inhabited by the *loa* Legba, Ogoun, Loco and Sauga.[5]

There is little in Aubin's description to suggest that hounfors were much different a half century ago from what they are today. He errs in identifying the "thunder stones" solely with Damballa. But his eye for detail was acute. In 1950 a mambo in the neighborhood of this hounfor described by Aubin affirmed that some of the loa stones and old coins which he mentioned are still to be found among the properties of a hounfor in the Cul-de-Sac Plain. Others were lost in one of the cleric-inspired raids which despoiled cult temples of drums and other paraphernalia about fifteen years ago.

Many services are held outside the hounfor and the peristyle. Some rituals, such as animal sacrifices and "talking to the loa below the water," may take place some distance from the cult buildings. Indeed, various Vodoun ceremonies may be held at waterfalls, at the seashore, in sacred groves, in ordinary homes, in a boat at sea,[6] or under a sacred tree.

The rites of the hounfor are almost without number. They are associated with the supplication or conciliation of virtually countless deities, each of which has his own special service. There are services in multitudinous combinations and permutations for the dead, for twins, for albinos, and for unborn children. There are ceremonies for the elevation of hounsi and for initiation, smoke and fire ordeals, and tests of other kinds. There are *mangé loa* (feasts for the deities) and *mangé morts* (feasts for the dead). There are services for the sick, for the crops, and for the harvest. In one context or another, Vodoun relates to nearly every aspect and phase of life—and its counterpart, death. Since every region, every locality, and, in fact, almost every hounfor has developed its own ritual out of the common materials, it is possible to see hundreds of ceremonies without ever seeing precisely the same one twice. Yet the common elements bind them all together.

One such prime element is the possession, the "mounting" of the human body by one of the deities. Possession is a psychological phenomenon common to the rites of many cults throughout the world. It is known in Asia, Africa, Europe, and America. It is not the unique property of the African and his Haitian descendant. In the United States it is a commonplace not only among certain Negro cults but certain white cults as well. The United States Negro had ample West African inspiration for his seizures in the church and at the baptism. The intellectual meaning of these seizures has changed, as have their outward forms to a measurable extent, but their emotional content has not altered.

[5] [Translated from the French of Aubin, En Haiti, pp. 59-59. Cf. P. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]
[6] [Footnote appears on P. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]

2: Courlander 8-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

they say, and "rides" them. What the possessed persons do then depends upon the personality and whim of the loa. Generally they take on the special personal characteristics of the loa. Their voices and manners change and their postures and attitudes undergo transfiguration. They may talk about the "island below the water," about community ancestors, about intimate affairs of the community, or about how things are going back in Africa. Sometimes they utter words or phrases recognized as "African language." And on occasion possessed persons talking *langage* are said to be speaking Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, or Spanish. At the moment of first impact, when the loa enter their heads, they stagger, jerk, and tremble, often falling on the ground. Then, soon afterward, their behavior begins to move in a groove of conventionalized activity.

Most commonly the loa arrive during religious rituals or dances. They come by way of the *po'teau mitan*, the center pole which supports the roof of the peristyle. It is around this pole that the sacred vèvès, or flour drawings, are made. At the foot of the pole sacrifices are offered and libations are poured.

Yet possession may occur anywhere and at any time. The sound of a certain drumbeat may be the signal for it, or a sudden fright, or an emotional crisis, or any situation to which possession has been conditioned. The houngan or the mambo may facilitate possession, control it, and terminate it. The cult priest is acutely sensitive to the conditions favorable to possession. He knows how to heighten emotional tension and how to soften it. A competent houngan "plays" his service as though it were a delicate instrument. He takes everything in, issues instructions to his servitors from time to time, orders the drum tempo increased or diminished, knows how to change pace. Sometimes he hovers in the background unobtrusively, encouraging the singing and dancing like a benevolent father. At other times he comes to the center of the activities and takes command. He becomes the focus of all eyes. His slightest action is watched with intensity. He may take the hand of one of the servitors, pirouette him about, and compel the loa to enter. When the servitor is "mounted," the houngan may conduct him through ritual activity. At the right moment the houngan may help the loa to leave.

The spectators who observe possession in others are usually aware of the identity of the loa who has entered. When the ancient loa Damballa Wèdo comes in, his "horse" falls to the ground, wriggles like a snake, and makes what are considered to be snakelike sounds in his throat. For Damballa is the venerable deity identified with the rainbow, which in ancient Dahomean lore was thought to be the great serpent come out from the underworld to drink after a rain. When the loa Ogoun Chango enters,

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1959) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

Boulicha Nago, or Boulicha of the Nagos; Èzilie Wèdo and Èzilie Doba, possibly from Wèdo and Doba in Dahomey; Tijean Pied Chêche (Tijean Dry Feet), a loa of bad character, "dry feet" signifying malevolence; and Legba Grand Chimin, or Legba of the Highway.

Identification of loa is often made difficult by the use of the generic or family title only. The term Nago covers all the loa associated with this "nation" (Nago Piment, Amine Nago, Boulicha Nago, etc.), but in a song or service any one of them is as likely as not to be referred to simply as Nago, with no clue to his exact identity. Each listener takes the name to designate the Nago loa with whom he is most familiar, unless possession occurs and the loa is otherwise identified by the behavior of his "horse."

On the whole, it appears that there was in the beginning a strong awareness of regional origins. There are names among the cult pantheons which indicate Senegal, Dahomey, Nigeria, Congo, and Angola origins. Many loa bear the names of African towns. Among the Ogoun family of loa, for example, are such regional designations as Badagry and Jèkkè, the first being a town in Nigeria and the second in Dahomey. It is clear that a detailed geographical knowledge of certain West African regions would considerably illuminate a study of Haitian loa.

Local shrines, too, doubtless enter into the naming system. Badagry is the name of a town in Nigeria, and it is also a Dahomean word designating the structure in which young men used to be circumcised and initiated into the secrets of warriors. In this particular light, the loa Ogoun Badagry might be regarded as the deity of that particular ritual center.

In discussing the complicated relationship of their loa, Haitians sometimes say: "There are seven of everything. There are seven Marassas, seven Ogouns, seven Èzilies. There are seven brothers and sisters in every family of loa." Or they say something such as: "There is only one Legba, but there are seven. There is only one Ogoun, but he has many moods and names. There is only one Èzilie, but she has seven faces." This concept is also held by the Arara (Arada) cult of Cuba. It is interesting to note the extent to which duplications and new generations of loa have been set up into family households in the most literal sense. Those families are still growing. In the Gèdé family I have counted more than thirty seemingly distinct individuals (see Appendix I[1]). Herskovits mentions a number of others, and still more have been cited by other writers on the subject. When I pointed out to some Haitians that the Gèdé family numbered far more than seven individuals, they were unable to account for the situation. Other Haitians took the vast army of Gèdés as a matter of course. The Ogoun family, too, is large and growing. Twenty-seven Ogouns are listed in the compilation in Appendix I. Still more have been recorded elsewhere.

1 [See p. 317ff., Category 116.-- Analyst]

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1969 SV3 Haiti SV3

of ground maize prepared by the laplace. The chicken, released, sat motionless, making no effort to escape. All watched attentively, the houngan shaking his rattle and bell. Suddenly the chicken cocked its head and, seeming to see the corn for the first time, reached out and pecked at it. This was the loa receiving the sacrifice—a difficult conception if one thinks of the chicken itself as the sacrifice. "Chèbo," l'Autorité, snatched the chicken up, danced violently about, the loa in full possession of her body. With a swift movement of the saber, she cut the chicken's throat and caused the first drop of blood to fall into the hole. When the chicken stopped struggling, it was left there, head downward. L'Autorité took up a cock which was given her, cradled him, and set him before the ground maize. When he pecked at it, she picked him up and danced, around and around, jerking, lunging, never quite falling. She took his comb between her teeth, supporting his body gently with her hands, and spun around and around. Then she released him, cut his throat, and placed him in the hole with the chicken.

At the side of the hounfor, waiting, was a goat (called by the ritual name Dogwé). He had a fine silky white coat and a long beard. He was brought in to the place of sacrifice, and l'Autorité dropped to her knees to embrace his neck with her arms. She remained there a moment, her cheek against his, talking to him. Then she arose, a machete in hand instead of a saber, and began to pirouette while three men threw the goat on his side. Then she cut with the machete, and the goat's blood, too, began to run into the hole. For the first time her dance became unquestionably frenzied. She swung strong, full blows of the machete at the goat's neck, finally severing the head. From the hindquarters she cut a piece of red meat and placed it in her mouth.

At a signal from the houngan, three men carried the goat's body away to be dressed and cooked, and a woman came forward to wipe the blood from Papa Chèbo's face.

The drums began again, a Dahomé dance, and the people relaxed. Many joined in the dancing while l'Autorité strutted about shaking hands and talking *langage*. She also danced, with gestures and movements wholly masculine. At one point she briefly advanced on another woman, making sexual gestures.

The houngan and his houngénicon retired to the front room of the hut. A new mat had been placed there for the houngénicon. She lay down on it, and the houngan sat in a chair against the wall. This was the beginning of the ceremony of calling *les morts en bas dleau* (the dead below the water).

Meanwhile, before the hounfor, the laplace and a hounsi were building

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

the *cuvi*, a hogan-like structure made of bent saplings covered with cotton cloth.

Rain had been threatening all evening, and now it began. Some people crowded into the hut where the goat was being barbecued. Others came into the hut where the houngénicon lay; in the back room, with the pé, Chébo, l'Autorité, strutted and shook hands with the visitors. The straw roof leaked a little, but no one minded very much. The houngan and his houngénicon, who had been under a strain, relaxed. The rain would mark the length of the intermission. Except for the sound of the rain and "Chébo's" *langage*, there was no noise. No one spoke. Then the houngan, his eyes closed, began to sing an Ibo song.

Ibo Lazile oh, éya!
Grand gout manqué tuyé moin!
A la yun an six mois m' sous la mer,
Grand gout manqué tuyé moin!

Ibo Lazile, oh, éya!
Hunger has not killed me!
One year and six months I have been under the sea,
Hunger has not killed me!

The others sang responsively:

Ibo Lazile, oh, Ibo!
Ibo grand gout pas tuyé'm, Ibo!

Ibo Lazile, oh, Ibo!
Ibo, hunger has not killed me, Ibo!

After a while the houngan called "Abobo!"—which was the signal to conclude. The rain was still coming down, and he called "Abobo!" for the rain to cease also. But it did not stop, and everyone laughed. He began another song, also Ibo:

Ianman Ibo lélé!
Ianman Ibo lélé!
Pilet pied'm mandé pardon,
Ça pardon wa fai pou moin?
Ça ou gainyan con ça? [Ex. 80]

Ianman Ibo lélé!
Ianman Ibo lélé!
Step on my foot and ask my pardon,
What will the pardon do for me?
What do you have [what are you doing] like that?

And the others came in, spiritedly:

Ianman, oh, un hunh!
Ianman, con ça'm dansé Ibo!
Ianman, oh, un hunh!

Ianman, oh, un hunh!
Ianman, like this I dance, Ibo!
Ianman, oh, un hunh!

2: Courlander 8-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

While those in the front room were singing, l'Autorité, in the inner room, was suddenly thrown about violently by her possession. She raced into one wall of the hut, striking her head, flung herself back against the opposite wall, kicking, trembling, calling out strange *langage*. She crashed into the pé, upsetting the dishes, and then fell across the mat where the children were lying half asleep. One of them, a boy of about four, became hysterical. He knew the woman, but he had never seen her like this. His mother carried him to the front room, where she finally quieted his crying. L'Autorité, spent for the moment, lay across the mat. No one touched her. Later, when the singing was resumed, she got to her feet and made the rounds once more, shaking hands again and again. She was now smoking a pipe.

When the houngan heard the rain subsiding, he again called out "Abobo!" as though he were giving the order to cease, and everyone, himself included, laughed again. When it had definitely stopped, someone went out to shake the water from the canopy. The drums were brought out of their shelter, and although the ground was sticky with mud, the dancing was resumed. The houngan asked for a fast Nago dance, and the front room of the hut was once more emptied of everyone except the houngan and his houngénicon.

The laplace and his assistant went up the hill to put the finishing touches to the *caye*, the temporary structure in which the houngan was going to receive the loa and the dead. From a small chest of chinaware, the houngénicon set a "table" for the loa on the ground where she sat. The sacrifice had been for a single loa, Chébo; the rest of the service was for all the loa served by the family. The houngan, sitting next to the houngénicon, sounded his rattle and spoke *langage*. He sang quietly, a song which only the houngénicon could hear, watching her intently. A large basket of dishes, bottles, and various other paraphernelia was brought by a hounsi. Candles were lighted and set on the ground. The houngan gave a signal, and the hounsi brought a large square of white cotton cloth, which they stretched tight over the houngénicon like a canopy. The candle flame and the silhouette of the houngénicon could be seen through the cloth, but the details of the service were not visible. Sometimes, the houngan, his bell and rattle in hand, would go under the cloth to assist in the calling of the loa. Then, without warning, things began to happen very rapidly.

One of the hounsi who sat before the door began to quiver and make strange noises in her throat: "Ka, ka, k-k-k-k-k-k-a!" Her body shook violently, and her head rolled on her shoulders. Almost simultaneously something began to happen under the cloth where the houngénicon was, and the members of the family crowded up to the *caye* by the hounfor. The houngénicon lay stiffly, her eyes closed, the white cloth removed. The

2: Courlander B-S (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

Oh, a day will come when they will remember me here, *kélé manyan!*
Oh, Damballa Wèdo *é, kélé manyan.*
Oh, Ayida Wèdo *é, kélé manyan!*
Oh, a day will come for you to remember me here, *kélé manyan!*

During the evening about twenty loa and ancestors came into the *cuvi* to talk. When the last had finished speaking the hills were already light, and the service was over.

Service for Èzilie Fréda and St. Jacques Majeur

This service took place not in the open but under a tonnelle surrounded by four walls, adjoining the hounfor of Alexis Stephan on the west fringes of Port-au-Prince. Separate from the hounfor and dance court was a shrine to the "dead" loa Gèdé Nimbo. The shrine was a small shed open on one side. Within, lighted by flickering oil lamps, was a life-size effigy of Gèdé, a scarecrow-like figure dressed in the loa's traditional attire—black tail coat and trousers, and a tall opera hat. On the otherwise blank face of the figure were smoked glasses with white rims.

The dancing was progressing under the supervision of the houngan's adjutant, the laplace. He wandered among the drummers and dancers, encouraged the singing, and issued orders here and there. No one seemed to take him very seriously. There was a good deal of joking, and the gathering seemed very much like an old-fashioned family reunion. There were perhaps a hundred dancers and spectators—friends, relatives, and devotees of Stephan's hounfor. Everyone was watching with affection an old woman who could not be restrained from dancing. She executed old classical steps and postures with a skill that called for running comment all around her. As each piece came to an end someone would step up to her and say something like: "Woy, Manman, mais ou passé mwé!" (Oh, Mother, you are better than me!). Then they would attempt to get her to sit down again, but she would only shake them off and urge the drummers to get going if they were not too tired.

Eventually, the houngan, Stephan, made a casual entrance through the door of his adjoining hounfor. He held the usual ritual rattle and bell in his hand, and sauntered around to chat with his friends.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the dancing became more serious. Soon, only the hounsi, the female servitors, were dancing. The drums played a salute to Legba, the first loa to be called upon in a Vodoun service. For it is Legba who opens all gates and all highways, and who paves the way for communication with other deities. Though he is not the greatest of the loa, he is one of the most ancient. The houngan spilled water on the ground as a libation, and the dancing continued.

2: Courlander B-8 (1837-1855) 1960 SV3 Hai81 SV3

remembers many of the details. But during the administration of President Louis Borno (1922–1930) there was a reenactment of the original march. There suddenly appeared in the streets of Port-au-Prince a crowd of Gèdé *mystères*—houngans "possessed" by Gèdé Nimbo and attired in Gèdé dress: tall black hats, long black tail coats, smoked glasses, black skirts over their black trousers. They carried flags, waved polka-dot kerchiefs, shook their ceremonial rattles, and paused sometimes to wipe the perspiration from one another's faces. They became the nucleus of a huge, noisy crowd moving up the hill toward the palace. Market women followed instead of going home; street gamins screamed and raced among them. Before they had arrived at the palace grounds they had taken on the semblance of a huge Mardi Gras band. They swerved through the gates of the palace grounds and along the drive, right to the steps of the palace itself. The guards, taken by surprise, waited helplessly for their officers to arrive.

At the palace door, the houngans demanded money from the president. Borno was in a dilemma. He was reputed to be sympathetic to Vodoun ritual but was only surreptitiously so. He feared the houngans, and he feared public opinion. What would the upper class of Port-au-Prince think, the Latin-culture Haitians? With Gèdé's worst manners, the Gèdé mystères cavorted on the palace steps. Finally Borno gave in. He sent the money out to them, and then the crowd of Gèdés marched out of the palace grounds, waving their flags and shaking their rattles.

Service for the Hounsi Bossale

This ritual of calling the loa to speak through the mouth of the Vodoun priest took place in the Bolosse section of Port-au-Prince. The hounfor was situated in a congested slum area of the city, but the grounds around it were spacious. The hounfor itself was small and unpretentious, and except for the adjoining tonnelle would easily have been mistaken for another small wooden house. The houngan was a heavy-set man with a black mustache. Quick to laugh and easy in his movements, he nevertheless commanded solemn respect from the hounsi and the other participants. His soft-spoken voice expressed assurance and authority.

There were a number of possessions in the course of the dancing, all more or less routine. Each time a possession occurred, the houngan came forward with his asson and bell, gave a pitcher of water and a candle to the possessed devotee, and conducted her through a ritual at the foot of the center post.

Later, one of the hounsi came and sat at the houngan's feet. She was not possessed but obviously was in a state of high tension. Other servitors brought from the hounfor a wooden washtub and set it on the ground

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1965) 1969 SV3 Haiti SV3

before the houngan. Staring into the tub, he shook his asson and called upon a certain loa to enter. Then he placed a lighted candle upright in the tub and watched it for a moment. The flame was suddenly snuffed out. The houngan looked concerned. He removed the candle and called for another one. When he placed the new candle in the tub it remained burning. The houngan smiled. The loa had agreed to enter. The houngan and his chief assistant placed the tub upon the head of the waiting hounsi. She trembled violently as though she had received a shock, then leaped to her feet. The loa had mounted her and presumably was sitting in the tub on her head. She began to stagger back and forth across the dance court, while the drums beat a salute. The tub tottered dangerously but did not fall. The possessed hounsi then began to whirl. She stopped, and the tub continued to spin for a few seconds on her head. She twirled again in the opposite direction. Each time she stopped she waited for the tub to stop spinning. The twirling motion was accompanied by a constant jerking and lurching, as though she were about to lose her balance, but she never stumbled or fell. After perhaps five minutes of this violent "riding" by the loa, the houngan approached her with his asson and conducted her into the hounfor, the tub still on her head. Inside the hounfor he removed the tub, sent the loa away, and left the hounsi to rest.

There was more dancing, and after a while the service was transferred to a small temporary cloth-covered structure resembling an American Indian hogan. The hounsi bossale—the servitors whose loa had not been "tamed" or conditioned—lay before the structure on their faces, side by side. There were twelve of them. The other hounsi covered them completely with white sheets. The houngan entered the hogan-like structure (the *cord*) with a candle and a bell. He tinkled his bell and began to call upon the loa to speak to the hounsi bossale. Through his mouth, first one spirit and then another made comments. The hounsi under the sheets were tensely quiet, until one of them began to jerk and scream. Several others, as though responding to a trigger, joined in the screaming. Older women came to quiet them. The hysterical reaction of the hounsi bossale was regarded as simply a reflection of their beginners' status. Their loa had not yet been controlled. The ritual continued until the early hours of the morning, the loa and ancient ancestors coming in to speak, one after another.

The First Yams and the First Rice

Each year, when the yams are harvested there is a great festival known as the *mangé yam*. Of all things grown in Haiti, the yam is perhaps the most significant. It is the most vital of all staples, and it is traditional. The yam

2: Courlander 8-8 (1937-1955) 1969 SV3 Haiti SV3

If it should happen that on the appointed day four years later the family is unable to hold the regular feast for Grand Bois, the grand famille goes to the tree sacred to the loa, with a bottle of *siro'* and other token gifts. He explains the difficulties of the family; he tells the loa that it has been a bad year, that the crops have been poor, and that the family has not been able to accumulate enough money to buy sacrificial animals. He asks Grand Bois for a six-month postponement. The loa agrees to the postponement, making his intentions clear through various signs when the grand famille is possessed. "Grand Bois is a good loa," people say, "but if you fail to meet your obligations to him he will be very stern. If you don't keep your promise to him, he may seize you [i.e., kill you]."

When the rites for Malt' Grand Bois are finished, services for Ogoun and the Dahomé deities may be held, beginning on Friday and running through the week end. The Ogoun service is a festive affair. There is much singing and dancing, and early on Saturday morning the sacrificial bull is dressed and decorated with red and blue kerchiefs. Red and blue ribbons are tied to his horns, and he is led on a grand tour to various places, including Ogoun's tree. The drummers walk behind him, and after them members of the family, some dancing, some singing, and some mounted by the loa Ogoun. The procession passes three times around the cemetery, then heads back toward the family *habitation*. When the participants reach the tree sacred to Legba, they sing to this loa, invoking him to "ouvri bayè pou' moin" (open the gate for me). Finally, when the procession reaches the *habitation*, the sacrificial bull is killed. After Ogoun has been served his mangé, the rites are terminated with an *action de grâce*.

Near Anse-à-Veau there is a dried-up spring. It is said that many years ago during a big service for Malt' Grand Bois a man mounted by this loa rushed to the foot of a large tree and began clawing at the ground. He dug a hole there with his hands, and when it was only a few feet deep, water began to flow. The members of the société later enlarged the hole and lined it with stone. It was discovered that a giant crab was living in this water. One year, a service to Malt' Grand Bois was missed. The crab disappeared from the spring, and soon the water stopped flowing. "Grand Bois gives," the people say, "but if he is not remembered he also takes back."

Possession by the Loa Pinga Maza

On the outskirts of Port-au-Prince there is a hounfor dedicated to the loa Pinga Maza, also known by the name Bakulu Baka. He is a ferocious and fearsome spirit of the Pétro family who is known for his propensity

In Courlander 8-6 (1937-1965) 1966 SV3 Haiti SV3

to "eat" people; that is, to destroy them. To do this he employs such means as disease, insanity, and destruction of crops. If a man serves Pinga Maza well, the loa protects him in return; but for those who anger him, Pinga is a menacing and vengeful creature. People often say, "Pinga, c'est djab" (Pinga is a devil).

The Pinga hounfor in Port-au-Prince is called the *Société de la Belle Jeune Fleur*. Its peristyle is simple and is hardly distinguishable from those of other small hounfors. Around the base of the center pole is a three-foot-high wall of masonry, decorated with simple cult symbols. The outer room of the hounfor proper also resembles many another. The familiar pot têtes containing loa stand on a wooden altar, and there are Catholic lithographs on the walls. But the inner room belongs exclusively to Pinga Maza. Here are all the accoutrements and objects sacred to the deity. Everything is red. Pinga's clothing and kerchiefs are red. On the walls are painted esoteric designs—hands, skulls, and crosses—all in red. The bottles, magic bundles, and govis on the altar are decorated with red cloth, ribbons, or paint. In the middle of the earthen floor is embedded a heavy wooden cross. On each end of the crossbeam hangs a large calabash resembling a bulbous hand. And on top of the upright is affixed a human skull. The total impression of this hounfor is that of a bizarre aberration, calculated to intimidate and terrify. The houngan himself is relatively young, literate, and city wise. His personality is smooth and sharp, and he lacks the air of sincerity and easy simplicity which most often characterizes the houngan of the mountains.

In this inner room, before the skull and the cross, there took place a small service for a client, to determine what kind of magic was needed to fend off malevolent actions of an enemy. On the day of the divining session, there hung from the rafters of the tonnelle a long rope, which extended into a deep hole in the earth near the door. Hanging on the rope, down inside the hole, were two gray dolls tightly bound together. Hanging still farther down were a knife, a fork, and other, unidentifiable objects. This cluster of magic paraphernalia was an *expédition* at work; it was an elaborate pouin, which was working against an enemy who lived far away.

Before entering the hounfor, the houngan took a long rope whip from the wall and cracked it seven times before the door. This process, known as *frete cache*, was to "wake up" the loa within. The houngan then entered, followed by the client who was seeking help. They paused briefly in the outer room, where the houngan took up his asson and bell and made a small vèvè on the ground. He spoke briefly in *langage* and then passed on through the door to the inner room. There the

2: Courlander 8-5 (1857-1968) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

of Haiti. But the route to it is through water. When the Haitians say "under the water" they do not mean under the sea. The ocean is regarded as the special domain of Agwé, La Sirène, and a few related deities, but it has nothing to do with most loa. "Under the water" specifically means under the springs, the rivers, and the fresh-water lakes. Fresh water has the greatest of significance in relation to most of the Vodoun deities.

When a loa comes to visit his Haitian children he comes by way of the *chimin dleau* (the water road)—that is to say, by way of the river, the waterfall, or the spring. Because the spring is the primary source of fresh water, it is the most direct means of contact with the land of the loa. Tales are heard everywhere of persons who, drawing water from the spring at night, heard the voices of loa or the sound of singing and drumming coming up from somewhere below. And virtually all the tales about human beings who visited the land of the loa describe them as descending into a river or disappearing into a waterfall.

The loa are accustomed to traveling by the "water road." And in all aspects of the Vodoun service, this "water road" is refreshed and replenished. When the road is dry, contact with the loa is diminished. When it is moist, the loa travel easily.

Thus, the houngan constantly uses water to entice and invite the deities. He holds a glass or pitcher of water at the center pole of his peristyle. He extends it toward the four cardinal points. He spills water at the foot of the center pole. He spills water in the hounfor at the foot of the *pé*, or altar. He sets a pitcher of water at the gateway of his *habitation*. And often, during a service, he pours a pathway of water in the dust from his gateway into his peristyle. Within nearly every hounfor there is at least one *bassin*, or pool, dedicated to the loa who is the *maît' caille*, the master of the house. These pools are carefully filled with water drawn from the springs. They are places of rest and refreshment for the deities whose names or portraits are inscribed on the walls above.

Sometimes rites and services are held at the site of the spring, the houngan and his entourage marching down to it from the hounfor for the occasion. So, too, there are annual pilgrimages to waterfalls such as Saut d'Eau, where the loa mount their "horses" in profusion.

Within the hounfor, during a service, the cult priest and the servitors pour "libations" of water on the earth, so that the loa may be refreshed. And virtually without end, the hounfor is the scene of ritual ceremonies in which the loa is bathed and thus "renewed" in the heads of his servitors.[1]

[1] [For footnote, see category 116, P. 351.--Analyst]

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3
[B 112-M]

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19. Vodoun altar of the hounfor "Caille Agwé" in the Cul-de-Sac Plain. On the wall behind the altar are names of favored loa. On the altar are jars containing loa and souls of dead persons. Painted on its front wall, against which swords and flags are leaning, is the ship of Loa Agwé.

2: Courlander R-S (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

[P.112-N]

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20. *A Vodoun altar in northern Haiti, scarcely distinguishable from a Catholic shrine. Houmfors range from the simple to the complex, from the poor to the rich, from the primitive to the sophisticated, and from the bizarre to the artistic.*

[914]
[916]

21. *Altar in the houmfor "Société de la Belle Jeune Fleur" in Port-au-Prince dedicated to the lwa Pwga Mana. The cross surmounted by the skull represents the deity. Behind the table, leaning against the cross, is the pestle with which this lwa "grinds" his ounsis. On the other table are water blades for Pwga Mana to eat.*

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

[P.112-R]

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27. Saluting the lua. In the center, with sword, is the lapiase, flanked by two houngi carrying sequin-studded flags. In the background, left, is the houngan with his asson.

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 EV3 Haiti EV3

[P 112-S]

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18. A yam harvest festival. The men are carrying the yams into the peristyle of the houngfor to be cut up and shared with the family ancestors and the lwa.

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3
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29. *The* bain de Noël, *or Christmas bath. The men are pulverizing leaves in the mortar, to the accompaniment of singing by the houngi and drumming. Later, a "bajine" will be made of the powdered leaves, and all will share it.*

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

used for wall hangings much as appliquéd cloths are used in Dahomey. Near Cap Haitien, in the north, ceramic workers make crude clay figurines of roosters, pigs, dogs, cows, and people. The "purpose" of these figurines is obscure, but it is likely that they are intended for use in Vodoun ritual, a number of them having been observed in houmfors in the vicinity of the town of Grande Rivière du Nord. In some mountain villages, canes carved with animal and human heads are commonly seen. Nor is the tradition of carving gourds and calabashes, popular in various regions of West Africa, altogether forgotten. The *cayambouque*, a divided calabash with the top ingeniously cut to fit into the lower part so as to form a sealed container, is sometimes covered with carved geometric designs, usually crude and haphazard but on occasion meticulous. Until recent years the common *cha-cha*, or gourd rattle, was similarly carved.

Most of the visible traditional art is to be found in the environs of the cult temple. The inner walls of many houmfors are covered with ritual designs and symbols and portraits of the deities. On the altar, sometimes, crude wood carvings of deities are seen, along with forged iron objects, carved marassa bowls, and grotesquely shaped drumsticks known as *baguettes guinée*. All the wooden objects are characterized by a plainness that relegates them to the category of purely functional and expendable things. The wood carving of a deity is not an image, it is a representation; it can be sold or otherwise disposed of, even thrown away if infested with beetles, and another object can be used to replace it. The only concern of the cult priest in this matter is that the deity concerned should understand the situation properly and not take offense. Thus there is no strong feeling that the wood carving should be a realistic representation or that it should be "beautiful." One relatively antique wood carving, completely West African in style, was found some years ago in a houmfor near Léogane and is now in the collection of the Musée du Peuple Haitien in Port-au-Prince (see fig. 57).

One of the most flourishing arts of the houmfor is the *vèvè*, or ritual drawing made on the earth in the course of a service. Most commonly these beautiful and ornate designs are made with white meal or flour, and in a few of the cults, primarily the Pétro, lampblack and red brick dust are also used. The vèvè is made by the houngan or the mambo. With sure, practiced movements, the cult priest allows the meal to trickle through his fingertips onto the ground where the rites are taking place, usually in the peristyle of the houmfor itself. The drawings he makes are composed of a multiplicity of cabalistic symbols—heart shapes, stars, interlocked V's, flags, abstract phallic forms, crosses, swords,

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

[The Vodoun Pantheon]

any iron object, such as a sugar vat. In West Africa, Chango (or Shango) and Ogoun were considered separate deities. In Nigeria, according to Ellis, they were brothers, closely associated with each other. Among the Yoruba, Chango was a thunder-and-lightning god and he is believed to have been one of the early kings of Oyo. The African Chango, like the Haitian, is identified with fire, a corollary of lightning, and persons possessed by him may carry pots of fire on their heads and perform other fire tests.[11A]

Chango Gold. Another manifestation of Ogoun Chango.

Ogoun Bachango. Possibly the same as Ogoun Chango, or he may be named after the Bachangos, a Congo tribe. A warrior and ironworker.

Ogoun Balizal. One of the Ogoun family.

Nimbo Nimbo. One of the Ogoun family.

Archardé, Achardé, Chardé, or Chadé. One of the Ogoun escorte, sometimes called Ogoun Chadé, or Chadé Bocor.

Ogoun Yemoun. One of the Ogoun brothers.

Obatala, or Batala. A loa of war. Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, Obatala was a sky deity and protector of the town gates. He was thought to form children in the womb and was therefore believed responsible for albinism and congenital deformities.[12A] Obatala and Chango are among the main Lucumí (Yoruba) deities in Cuba.

Ogoun Bayé. An aspect of Ogoun who functions as a gateway guardian.

Ogoun Blanc (White Ogoun). He does not drink rum, which is a favorite beverage of his brothers.

Ogoun Jebba

Ogoun Jèkka, Jèkkè, or Yèkkè. A warrior and ironworker. Jèkkè may have been a shrine or regional designation.

Ogoun Kèkèk

Ogoun Kénbon

Yalodé, or Ogoun Lodé. Brother of Ogoun Badagry and the other Ogouns. Yalodé is clearly of Dahomean origin.[13A]

Ogoun Panama, or Ogoun Palama. Guardian against sunstroke, or spirit responsible for sunstroke. A brother of Ogoun Badagry. He is usually seen wearing a Panama hat.

Ogoun Pierre Narcisse

Ogoun Jéroux (Ogoun Red Eyes). A malevolent Ogoun brother, red eyes being a mark of bad behavior. Some people feel that he is a member of the Pétro rather than the Vodoun pantheon.

Nago Piment. A member of the Ogoun escorte. He eats hot peppers.

Boulichia Nago

Gèdé Nimbo, or Nibo, also called Brave Gèdé. One of the powerful deities of the Vodoun pantheon, particularly in the region of Port-au-Prince, where many hounfors cater extensively to him. Gèdé Nimbo, along with his numerous brothers and his vast escorte, is a "dead" loa, a spirit of the graveyard, a sexual rascal, and a violator of propriety. He is served apart from the other loa, and usually he has a separate altar or shrine outside the central hounfor. Cult centers for Gèdé are often near graveyards, though not necessarily so. Gèdé services abound around the main cemetery of Port-au-Prince. Gèdé Nimbo has various manifestations, but he is usually

11A [Ellis, The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples, P.47; W. R. Bascom, in Introduction To record albums Drums of the Yoruba of Nigeria (New York: Ethnic Folkways Library, 1950). Cf. P. 354, Category 116. -- Analyst]

12A Ellis, The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples P. 38 ff. Cf. P 354, cat. 116. -Analyst]

13A Ellis, The Ewe-Speaking Peoples, pp. 71-74; Herskovits, op. cit. I, 39. Cf. P. 354, Cat. 116. -- Analyst]

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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INTRODUCTION

IF the visitor to Haiti is first struck by the wide separation between the élite and the peasant masses, the person who knows Haiti only through books is sure to think of it as a country of Voodoo. There is no error of fact here, for Voodoo is characteristic of Haiti. Nevertheless, what the American conjures up in his mind when he uses the word is almost certain to be misleading. In spite of detailed reports of anthropologists the average American clings firmly to his notion that Voodoo is Negro superstition chiefly concerned with charms or spells to "hoodoo" (a variation of the same word) an enemy. Scientists rarely succeed in correcting long-held but incorrect or one-sided impressions of the meaning of terms; they end rather by inventing a new word, or else continue the generally losing fight for precise usage, and so preserve the confusion.[1]

Since there is small likelihood of eradicating the inexact connotations of "Voodoo," many recent anthropologists have adopted such spellings as Vodun, Vodou, Vodoun, Vaudou, and Vodûn, all renditions of local pronunciation of the same term. *Vodun* (pronounced Vo-doon) has been chosen for use in this work, in the hope that readers will bear in mind that the folk religion is not mere idle superstition. A grasp of the real and distinctive religious beliefs and cult practices of the Haitian is very necessary to an understanding of the social picture.

Like its caste system, the religious life of Haiti presents far-reaching contrasts. The only approved religion of the country is Roman Catholicism. To this faith all the élite who are religiously inclined, or wish to pay formal homage to the institution of religion, belong. No Protestant sect has ever gained a real foothold in Haiti. Catholic churches are among the imposing edifices in every town; Catholic priests are an everyday sight as they go about their parishes; Catholic brothers and sisters, with state support and approval, direct much of the higher education in the country.

1. Witness in anthropology the contrast between the popular and the scholarly meaning of *culture, race, taboo,* and *fetish;* in chemistry of *reaction* (as when a man is asked his "reaction" to an opinion); in psychology of *instinct, innate,* and *inherent;* and in sociology of *caste, institution,* and *social.*

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The depths to which Haiti descended under Soulouque made the task of his successor relatively simple. It would prove wise and generally popular to reverse the Emperor's action, in whatever respect. President Geffrard was the more successful as an antidote to the Emperor because of his practical intelligence. The best time to strike for the revival of Catholicism would be immediately after the heyday of Vodun. In 1859, the first year of his incumbency, Geffrard consequently undertook negotiations with the Holy See, sending two plenipotentiaries for the discussions. Because the Haitian delegates persuasively depicted the sorry state of religion in their country, because they showed themselves and their President willing to defer to papal wishes, and because the new Pope was filled with missionary zeal to reclaim Haiti for the Faith, all problems were overcome. An early agreement was reached, and the Concordat, signed in Rome on March 28, 1860, was approved by the Haitian Senate on the first of April. A commission was dispatched to Haiti immediately, one which did thoroughly and well its task of delimiting the boundaries of dioceses, allocating bishops and other clergy, and founding a seminary. An archbishop of Port-au-Prince was consecrated, and the Catholic Church, Roman and apostolic, at long last became officially established once more in the republic. The breach of fifty-five years was healed.

In one sense the reform had come too late. All the peasants were by this time thoroughly imbued with the ideas of Vodun, as were the lower orders in the towns. Most of the élite either clandestinely practiced Vodun or ignored religion altogether. On the other hand, practically no Haitian was opposed to Catholicism, not even the most ardent devotee of the obscurer cult. The native faith had grown up quietly enough, making its adjustments to the outward forms of Catholicism which still existed in the country. To every Vodun worshiper there were simply two hierarchies of spiritual beings, each with its own powers; to believe in one was not to deny the other. The new Catholic priests, then, met no hostility; what they had to deal with was an ineradicable folk religion which accepted everything and rejected little in the spiritual realm.

The Archbishop, his band of forty priests, and a small group of Brothers and Sisters set to work with fervor. Nearly everything had to be rebuilt from the ground. Church buildings were in such disrepair that it was considered more economical to erect new ones than

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to try to renovate the old. Gradually the work became established, increasing in scope with the years.

It is not necessary to present a detailed history of the work of Catholicism in Haiti since 1860. The most striking feature of these years is its relationship to Vodun, which will be treated shortly. The progress made by the Church itself can best be seen by a summary of conditions in 1930.

Haiti is divided into dioceses named after its principal towns and cities. The population statistics are based upon figures of births covering more than fifty years, and although estimates, they are probably as accurate as any other population statistics for Haiti:

Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince	942,700
Diocese of Cap-Haïtien	453,000
Diocese of Les Cayes	628,000
Diocese of Gonaïves	475,000
Diocese of Port-de-Paix	153,590
Total	2,652,290

To care for this large and predominantly illiterate population there are 205 priests,[14] only 8 of whom are Haitians; 105 Brothers; and 366 Sisters.[15] The assiduous educational work of these *religieux* will be discussed in another connection.

The country's 10,200 square miles are divided into 112 parishes, which generally correspond to the political communes, although there are several parishes in the larger centres of population. In the rural sections 465 mission chapels are located at strategic points.[16]

Any casual attempt to assess the importance of religion in the daily

14. Of these, 156 are in charge of parishes or missions (the secular priests). The remaining 49 are regular clergy (that is, belonging to a religious or monastic order). All parishes in the diocese of Port-de-Paix and two in Port-au-Prince are in charge of the regular clergy; the other regular monks are doing educational work or other special service connected with the dioceses.

15. The Brothers are Frères de l'Instruction Chrétienne; of the number 83 are French, 10 French Canadian, 9 Spanish, and 3 Haitian. The Sisters belong to three congregations: 146 to St. Joseph de Cluny, 198 to Les Filles de la Sagesse, and 22 to Les Filles de Marie.

16. All the figures cited above are drawn from the *Report of the Forbes Commission to Haiti*, 1930, pp. 16–17.

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proper control, as they should be. If an unwanted god persists in mounting an individual, the pertinacious one is commanded to go away or the victim himself is sent home until he can recover his own personality. Many people strongly resist possession when it is imminent. Judged by our own standards, possession of the Vodun variety could certainly not be called normal; judged by Haitian standards, however, it would be absurd to call abnormal an experience known and approved by the majority of the community.[29]

Possession occurs either at the service or at the dance. Here again the white man has nothing in his religious experience to enable him to comprehend the pattern of Haitian religion. The service corresponds nearly enough to the Catholic Mass or to more realistic sacrifices in ancient Jewish rites, but neither of these faiths nor any other the white man knows well has dancing for religion's sake. In Vodun, however, the dance is of equal importance with the service.

In the tiny *houmfort* (also spelled *hounfort*) of the priest, which is little more than a hut with earthen floor, the service begins. To call this structure a temple is at once to make it too imposing and to confuse the white man in his attempt to understand the scene; it is no more of a temple than was a tiny primitive early Christian church. Most houmforts in Haiti would be crowded if twenty people were present. At one end is an altar, more or less resembling the high altar in a Catholic chapel; on it are placed a crucifix, flowers, candles, fruit and food, wine, lithographs of Catholic saints, and whatever other objects, Catholic or Vodun, local practice may dictate and individual taste prefer. Upon the floor are traced formal cabalistic patterns, generally in corn meal, both to fend off evil influences and as required by the particular loa. The officiants may be male or female or both. To the service ordinarily come only the members of the family and their specifically invited guests; neighbors and friends will attend the subsequent dance.

A student of Catholicism would find in the first part of the service a great deal of ritual borrowed from the Church. The blessing, genuflections, making the sign of the cross, responses, and the like, all clearly show a Catholic background which accords well with certain objects upon the altar. Imperceptibly the strictly Vodun element obtrudes itself. The loa are asked whether they will accept

29. The statement of the two sides of this controversy may be found in Dorsainvil, *op. cit.*, throughout; and in Herskovits, *op. cit.*, particularly pp. 146–147.

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the sacrifices; food is set before the sacrificial animal, and if this food is eaten by the creature or creatures, it is known that the loa is satisfied. Then comes the actual sacrifice of the animal, a slaying neither ostentatious nor dramatic, since often it does not occur in the houmfort itself. It is at this juncture that possession is looked for. The loa, by seizing one or more of his devotees—or, if possession fails, by the divination of the priest—makes known his desires. The demands of the loa are likely to be modest: a candle, a special article of food, certain specific attentions. Occasionally he insists upon an impressive sacrifice. Whatever his desires, they must be gratified or else the loa will mildly harass the family; long refusal will produce anger and full vengeance. If the god is Rada, his sacrifice will be white, red, or vari-colored; if he is Pétro, he will wish black or gray animals—chickens, turkeys, goats, bullocks.

The service itself, then, is entirely religious in nature, consisting wholly of ceremonies and rituals conducted by officiating priests, with the purpose of restraining or pacifying gods who may have been pursuing a family with misfortune, or gratifying those who have made it happy. The dance following the service apparently expresses the joy of the family at dangers averted and gratitude for blessings bestowed.

In contrast to the private character of the service, the dance has all the appearance of a social event. Invitations to it are sent all over the countryside. People attend for good fellowship, gossip, and the sheer delight of dancing, but in the background one is always aware of a religious element as well. The dance is held in a specially constructed *tonnelle*, a roof of boughs and leaves supported by uprights. Drums are not always used at the earlier service, but no dance could be held without them. The crowd drifts in slowly, so that the dance may be long in getting under way. The best drummers in the community may not arrive until after two or three hours. Three drums of different sizes, all properly baptized, set the rhythms, and sometimes gourd rattles embroider a commentary upon the beat. Whereas at the service possession comes as a result of the priest's invocations, at the dance it is inspired by the drumming. Each loa has his own particular rhythm, so that as soon as it is determined what god has seized upon a dancer the drummers take up the rhythm of that god. The officiant immediately rushes to the mounted person with a calabash of water and a candle; by following the "horse" around and

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There are sections, particularly in the capital, in which shanties more resembling chicken coops than dwellings house whole families under leaky roofs of crude thatch. Privacy, cleanliness, sanitation, are not to be thought of. That the sun is warm in Haiti is a blessing, for cold would creep through the gaping walls. Where the shanty dwellers go in the rain, where they get their food, what relieves the dreary round of daily monotony the important people of Haiti do not know, nor do many of them seem to care. President Vincent undertook to clear away a section of the most abject slums in Port-au-Prince, erected in their place a series of two-room (likewise two-family) houses about a central square. Compared with the hovels they replaced the new houses are palatial; compared with houses Americans would consider adequate, they look more like unimaginative garages. With what rapidity an epidemic of serious nature might sweep the lower sections of the city, which are but one vast slum, is a thought too harrowing to entertain.

In the whole city there are hardly half a dozen buildings which would detain the lover of architecture. The president's palace is a gleaming white structure, somewhat resembling the White House in Washington. With its background of lofty mountains it makes an impressive picture, although it stands naked in the vast public square of the city. Young palm trees are now growing in the square, and may before many years provide for the palace the setting it deserves. Inside the palace one's chief impression is of emptiness. Other government buildings range from plain white edifices which fulfill their practical function without any suggestion of aesthetic graciousness, down through the inferior grades to wooden structures which one passes without a second glance. The cathedral, placed upon an eminence, is unattractive both in its exterior and in the glaring interior. Upon one of its finger towers at night gleams a light to guide ships into the harbor. The clubs and a few of the villas are pleasant to look at; the colleges of the lay brothers are impressively large, but bespeak the provincial town.

Indeed, one wanders up and down the country in search of man-made beauty and finds only two examples, both partially ruined, and both in the North: Christophe's magnificent citadel, La Ferrière, and the shattered shell of his charming palace, Sans Souci.

The citadel is breath-taking. Astride a great peak the huge edifice resembles the mighty beak of a ship about to soar off into the atmosphere. Inside one can wander through endless vaults, gaze from